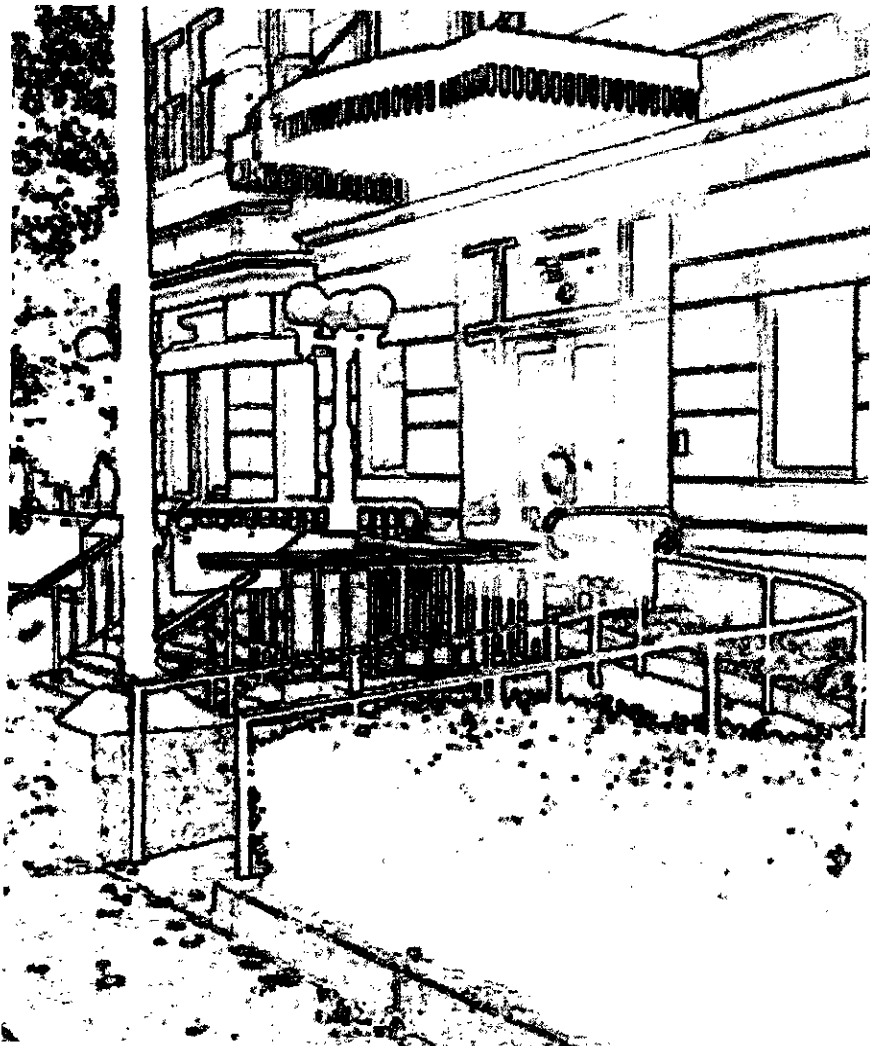


**District of Columbia
Historic Preservation Guidelines**

**ACCOMMODATING
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES IN
HISTORIC BUILDINGS**



Introduction

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law. Its purpose is to insure that most buildings used by the public and constructed or altered after January 1992, are accessible, to the greatest extent possible, to persons with disabilities. ADA accessibility requirements specifically apply to public accommodations, commercial facilities and government buildings. Public accommodations include hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail and service shops, transportation terminals, museums, schools, day care centers and other types of buildings typically frequented by the public. Commercial facilities include factories, warehouses, office buildings and other types of buildings primarily used by employees and business owners. Government buildings include those owned, leased or otherwise used by a local or state and the federal government or by any government agency or organization. Even when compliance with ADA requirements is not mandatory, building owners should consider making their buildings accessible to the disabled.

While historic buildings are not exempt from ADA requirements, the Act recognizes that compliance may threaten or destroy significant architectural spaces, features, materials or finishes. Thus the Act establishes a consultation process involving the building owner, persons with disabilities and the Historic Preservation Division that may allow alternative minimum requirements or alternative methods of compliance to be used. Alternative minimum requirements are typically adjustments made to dimensions or slopes of ramps, door widths and other features that will allow accessibility without significantly altering historic materials, features or finishes. Alternative methods of compliance are typically other ways to achieve accessibility. For example, in a historic house museum it may be possible to provide video tapes or CD-ROM information about the building or exhibits in accessible locations rather than provide accessibility to all floors.

ADA requirements are often quite detailed and their interpretation exact. This is particularly true for alternative minimum requirements and alternative methods of compliance. Thus, although every effort has been made to insure that the information in this publication is correct, an owner considering how to make his or her building more accessible should seek professional advice before proceeding with any alteration.

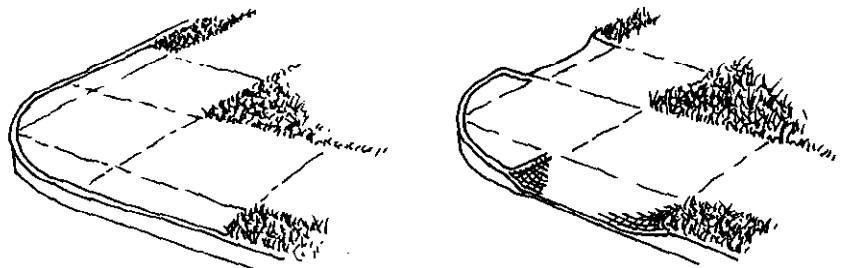
Planning for Accessibility

Adapting a historic building to meet ADA requirements should begin with an inventory of existing architectural barriers - steps, doors, interior stairs, restrooms and the like - that prevent or limit persons with disabilities from using the building. The inventory should include a description of the architectural significance of the barrier; describing why its design, materials and finishes are important to the historic character of the building. Next, methods of eliminating the barriers, or providing alternative methods of compliance should be investigated. How the proposed modification will affect the existing character of the feature should be carefully considered. In some cases, alternative minimum requirements also may be investigated.

Building Site

A route accessible to persons with disabilities from the public sidewalk or on-site parking to the building can often be achieved without significantly altering the character of the building or its site. For example, certain parking spaces can be designated for persons with disabilities and curb cuts made in appropriate locations. Sidewalks are typically wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, or can be widened with minimal affect on the landscape.(1) Steps can sometimes be eliminated and ramps installed.

When modifications are made to parking areas, curbs and sidewalks, it is usually appropriate to use the same type of material as existing. If a new material is introduced, it should be compatible in scale, texture and color with the historic material and the character of the building and landscape.(2)



1). A width of 3'-0" is the minimum for wheelchairs.

2). For further information on building sites, see ***Landscaping, Landscape Features and Secondary Buildings in Historic Districts.***

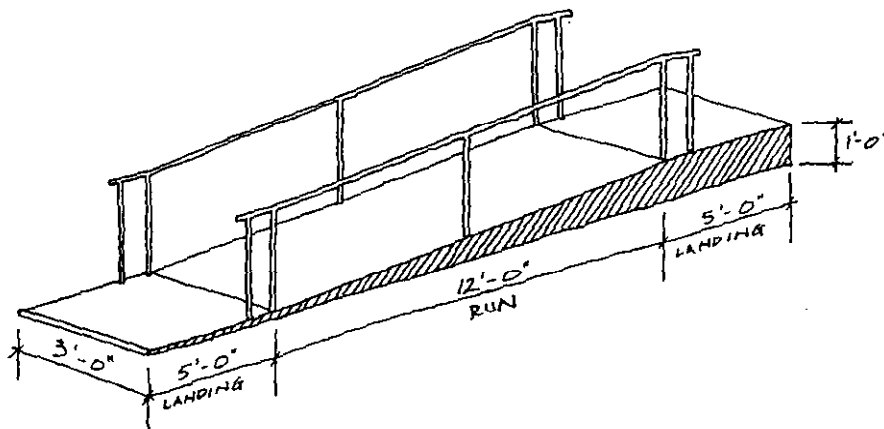
Curb cuts provide accessibility to a building's site.

Building Entrance

Creating an accessible entrance may require modifying steps, landings, doors and thresholds or adding ramps or exterior lifts. Ideally, the accessible entrance should be the primary entrance to the building. However, if modifying this entrance or adding ramps or lifts at this location would significantly alter the historic character of a building, then a secondary public entrance should be considered. Rear or service entries should not generally be considered the primary accessible entrance unless no other option is available. If a rear or service entrance is used as the accessible entrance, its appearance should be upgraded.

Ramps

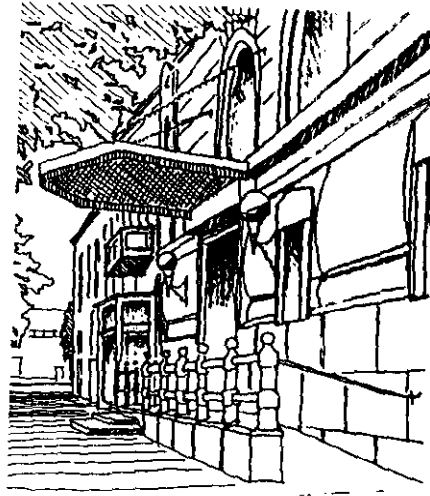
A ramp is the most common method of overcoming barriers created by exterior steps. Ramps should be a minimum of 3' wide with a maximum slope of 1" in height to every 12" in length. The run should not exceed 30' without a level landing at least 3' wide by 5' long.⁽³⁾ A non-skid surface should be used on a ramp and hand rails should be installed on both sides.



Ramps should conform to required minimum dimensions.

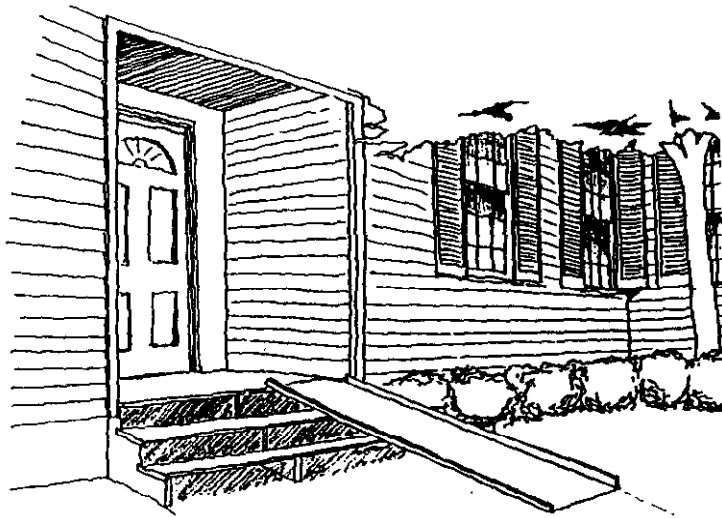
3). A run is the length of the sloped portion of a ramp.

The location of a ramp, its materials and details, are critical to its compatibility with a historic building. Often, locating a ramp adjacent to and parallel with the main facade is an appropriate solution. The side of a ramp should usually be constructed of the same material as the building facade or foundation wall. The ramp should be designed and detailed to be compatible with the building, that is, it should have similar materials, textures, proportions, scale and color as the foundation or wall.



The location, materials and details of a ramp are critical to its compatibility to a historic building.

In cases when the public uses a building infrequently , a temporary ramp, fitted over or beside the steps, may be an appropriate solution. In other cases, stair climbers may be used.(4)

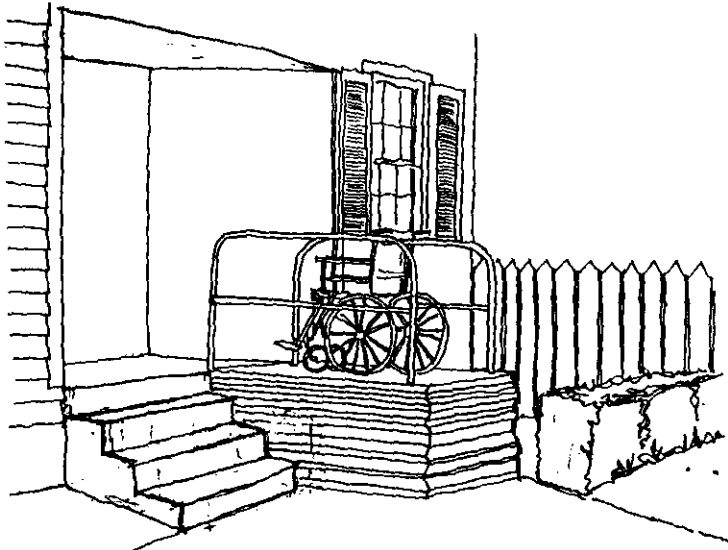


4). Stair climbers are traction equipment that can be temporarily fitted on to wheelchairs allowing them to climb short flights of stairs.

If a building is not frequently used by the public, a temporary ramp may be an appropriate solution.

Exterior Lift

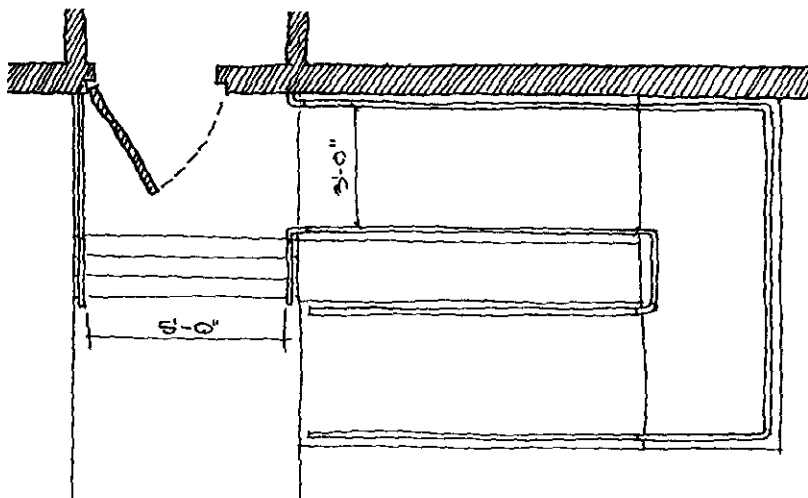
An alternative to a ramp or stair climber is an exterior lift. Manufactured in a wide variety of styles, exterior lifts are typically fitted with keys to prevent unauthorized use. In addition, they may be screened with a fence, wall or landscaping so they do not detract from the character of a historic building. Some models allow the lift to be hidden completely below grade when not in use.



An exterior lift may be an alternative to a ramp or stair climber.

Exterior Landing

The landing at an entrance to a building should be large enough to accommodate a wheelchair. Landings at entries to commercial, government and other buildings that have outward swinging doors should be a minimum of 3' wide by 5' long. Landings at entries to historic residential and other buildings with inward swinging doors, may be smaller if the configuration of the entrance does not allow for a 3' by 5' landing.

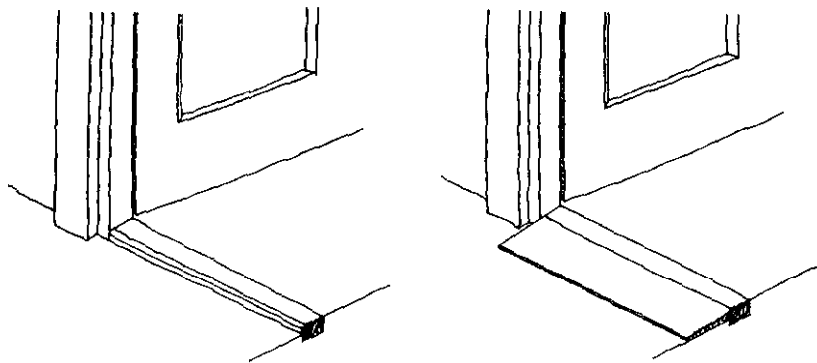


The landing at an entrance to a building should be large enough to accommodate a wheelchair as well as allow room to open the door.

Exterior Doors and Thresholds

An exterior door should typically be a minimum of 2'-10" wide, although a 2'-8" wide door may be acceptable. Where the entrance contains double doors, each leaf should be a minimum of 2'-6" wide. Doors used by persons with disabilities should also be easy to open. If the historic door is heavy or difficult to open, sometimes the hinges and balance can be modified to allow it to be easily opened without changing the historic character of the door. In other cases, power-assisted door openers and automatic closures can be installed without significantly altering the historic character of the door.

The threshold of an accessible door should not exceed 1/2" in height. If it does, and the threshold is not considered significant to the design of the door, it should be lowered or eliminated. If the threshold is architecturally significant it should be modified to allow accessibility while still retaining its historic character.



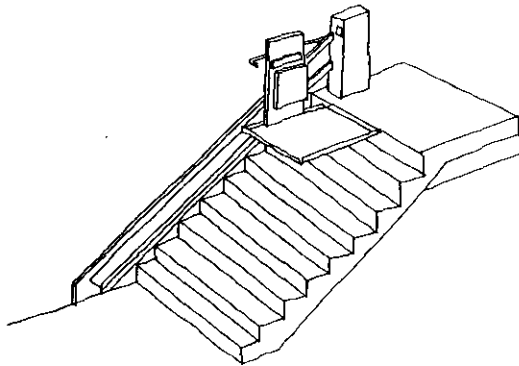
Exterior doors and thresholds should be modified to allow accessibility without compromising their historic character.

Building Interior

Creating an accessible interior may require adding stair lifts or elevators, and modifying interior doors, restrooms and amenities, or changes to rooms and fixtures. Although not typically reviewed by the Historic Preservation Division, any modification to the interior of a historic building should seek to retain its historic character.

Stair Lifts

Stairs are the primary interior architectural barrier in most historic buildings. In some cases, stair lifts can be installed to allow persons with disabilities to reach upper and lower floors. Stair lifts require a minimum width of 3' with a clearance of 3' by 4' at landings. Some stair lifts are designed to fold against the wall when not in use.



Interior stairs may be made accessible by adding a stair lift.

Elevators

In some cases, an existing elevator may not meet ADA requirements. Sometimes, the elevator can be altered without significantly changing its character. For example, if the control panel does not meet requirements, it can usually be modified without significantly altering the character of the elevator. Other times, however, the elevator cannot be modified without changing its character. For example, when the elevator cab does not meet ADA requirements, the building owner should investigate alternative methods of compliance or alternative minimum requirements before deciding to replace the cab.

In some historic buildings, installing an entirely new elevator is the best way to meet ADA requirements. If a new elevator is installed within the existing building, it should be located so that it does not significantly alter important character-defining spaces or require removal of significant materials or

finishes. For example, a new elevator should be located in a secondary space, such as a large closet or office rather than in an architecturally significant lobby or hallway.

If it is not possible to locate an elevator within the existing building, then an exterior elevator addition should be considered. The addition may also include a new fire stair. Additions should be located on a secondary, non-character-defining elevation rather than on the primary facade. As with any new addition, its design, exterior material and detailing should be compatible with the character of the building.(5)



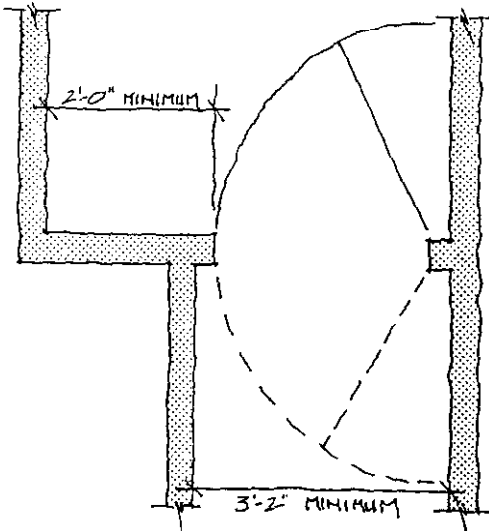
Exterior elevator additions should be compatible with the character of a historic building.

Interior Doors and Thresholds

Interior doors used by persons with disabilities should be a minimum of 2'-8" wide, opening in the appropriate direction. If existing doors are too narrow, replacing standard hinges with off-set hinges will gain an additional 1" to 1-1/2" in clearance without altering the character of the door. Hallways should be a minimum of 3'-2" wide if the doors swing into the corridor.

Thresholds should not be higher than 1/2". If they are, they should be modified or removed if they are not significant to the character of the door. Similarly, door knobs should be easy to grip and turn. If they are difficult to use and do not significantly contribute to the character of the door, they should be replaced with appropriately designed, easy-to-open lever-handles.

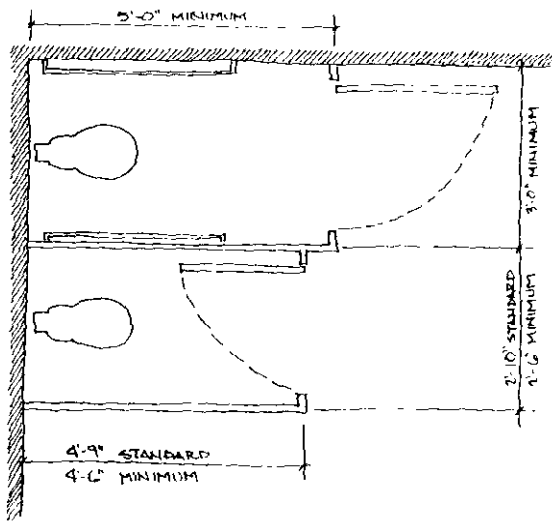
5). For further information on compatible additions to historic buildings, see ***Additions to Historic Buildings.***



Interior doors and thresholds may need to be modified to meet ADA requirements.

Restrooms

Public restrooms in historic buildings often need to be modified to be accessible to persons with disabilities. If the fixtures are non-character-defining, they should be replaced with ones that meet ADA requirements. Towel dispensers and other features can often be relocated to be made accessible. Existing stall enclosures can usually be relocated to meet minimum ADA requirements.

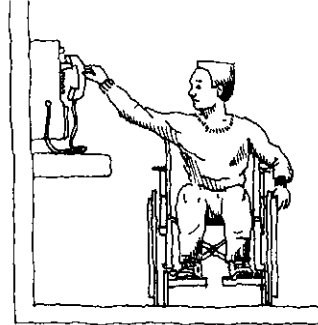


Existing restrooms can often be modified to meet ADA requirements.

If existing restrooms cannot be modified without significantly altering their character, the building owner should consider adding a new ADA accessible facility. If this option is selected, the new restroom should be located so it does not alter character-defining spaces or require removal of significant materials or finishes.

Amenities

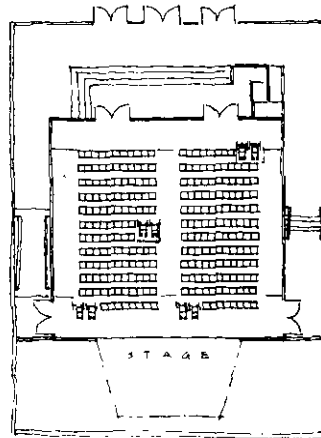
If public water fountains, telephones and other amenities are located in a historic building at least one of each should be accessible to persons with disabilities. If existing amenities can be modified without significantly altering their character, they should be. If they cannot, new amenities designed and located to be compatible with the character of the interior should be installed.



Telephones, water fountains and other amenities can often be made accessible to persons with disabilities.

Buildings with Special Uses

Some buildings, such as theaters, banks and government buildings, may require more extensive interior modifications to be accessible. For example, sloped theater floors may need to be leveled in places to accommodate wheelchairs. Counters in government buildings and banks may need to be lowered to accommodate persons with disabilities. In all cases, modifications should not remove significant character-defining materials or finishes and should be designed to be compatible with the character of the space.



Some buildings, such as theaters, may extensive modifications to meet ADA requirements.

More Information

A good source of information on ADA compliance is the *ADA Compliance Guidebook*, published in 1992 by the Building Owners and Managers Association International, 1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005.

For informal technical assistance and general ADA compliance information contact the U.S. Justice Department hotline at (202) 514-0301.

For additional assistance contact the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Disability Affairs at (202) 727-7247.

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